

# **Future Timelines for the Extinction and Adoption of New Technology in Hotels With Particular Reference to the Future Use of Service and Sexual Service Robots: A Manager's Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

Hotels have always been quick to adopt emerging technology; last century it was elevators, telephones and television, today it is wi-fi, ipad docks and adult movies. Through two focus groups of hotel managers, three scenarios were explored: the extinction of existing technology in the known future (next 10 years), the adoption of emerging new technology in the foreseeable future (10-20 years) and in the far future (20+ years) the emergence of advance technology, particularly in the provision of robots. The study explored the likelihood of robots providing a more active role in hotels in the future, by undertaking functions such as front office services, but it also investigated possible future use of sexual service robots, and the challenges this will present to hotel managers. The study concluded that service robots in hotels might become common, while the provision of sexual service robots will be a niche market, constrained by the norms of society.

**Key Words:** Hotels, Future Trends, Robots, Sexual Services

## Introduction

*We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there.* Charles Kettering.

*I have seen the future, and it's very much like the present, only longer.* Woody Allen.

The above quotes provide two interesting perspectives on the future. We should be concerned about it, but assume it will not be that much different from today, but can the same be said about the hotel of the future? Hotels were among the first commercial users of computers (such as Leo in the UK, in the 1950's) and they have always been keen to adopt emerging technology, but only after it has been proven. In the last century, it was: elevators, in-room telephones, televisions, air-conditioning and wi-fi, and in the future can we expect robot bartenders, robot call girls and boys and even robot cars and taxis (Lyons, 2011).

Throughout history, the hotel has been associated with the provision of sexual services for tourists, as O'Gorman (2010) has highlighted there has been a parallel growth in the provision of resting places for travellers and the demand for sexual services. As tourism has grown, so has the provision of hotels for tourists, and as Pritchard & Morgan (2006, p763) have noted, hotels have developed as a place of freedom from conventional society rules, and a location for 'transgressive behaviours and illicit sex'. One of the more recent trends has been the growth of hotels designed to provide sexual services as their core function. These have developed mostly in Far East, and have a long history in Japan in the form of 'love hotels' (Alexander, et al. 2010). These hotels make extensive use of technology to avoid as far as possible all human contact between the hotel staff and their guests, with rooms selected from a video screen, cash payments and extensive use of new technology. The popularity of this type of hotel is spreading, and in 2011 New Zealand opened its first love hotel (TVNZ, 2011).

The aim of this paper is to explore the merging of these issues (new technology and sexual services) through a discussion with hotel managers of: 1. Likely timeframes for the extinction and adoption of different types of technology in the known (next ten years), foreseeable (10-20 years) and far future (20+ years). 2. The development and use of different types of robots that may evolve in the far future and the manager's concerns about the use of robots in hotels. However, there are limitations which restrict the generalisation of the results from this study, as hotels, consumers, tourism products/services and technology are changing all the time. For example, ten years ago who would have forecast that there was a demand for boutique hotels, low cost airlines and that social media would be used for marketing. Therefore, the views expressed in this study must be seen as indicative.

## Literature Review

This topic could have been researched from a number of theoretical underpinnings: such as strategic foresights, marketing theory and even from the perspective of current business practices. While these outlooks are acknowledged as legitimate, the theoretical focus of this paper is drawn from futurist theory. This is a relatively new area of research development, particularly when applied to tourism research. The futurist approach was also used as a stimulus to encourage the hotel managers to participate, as it involved them in a process that was different in outlook from other studies of contemporary issues. In the development of the research problem and from initial discussions with the managers, it was clear that they did not

want the study to focus on day-to-day issues. Hence, when sexual services was mentioned as a potential topic of exploration, it was clear that topics such as adult movies or prostitution would be of little interest to the managers, and if explored, may impact on their agreement to participate in the study. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the manager's agreement to participate in the study influenced its focus.

The future has always fascinated us, and as Khannia & Khannia (2011) reminds us, this area of study is only 100 years old and started with Marinetti's 1909 pioneering study. The study of the future only became a serious topic for academic study after Toffler's 1970 publication: *Future Shock*. Over the last few decades there has been increase in not only futures studies (Barber, 2006; Bell, 1997; Peterson, 1997), but also in foresights thinking (Hayward, 2003; Taleb, et. al, 2010) which has led to organisations and their managers taking more interest in the development of trends and issues often outside their narrow sector interests, that may impact on the management, profitability and image of organisations.

Unlike the study of the future, there has been a long history of the relationship between sex and tourism and as Turner and Ash (1975) suggest, it can be traced in its modern form as far back as the Grand Tour. They suggest that such tourists were not interested in visiting tourist resorts, but under the guise of the pursuit of health, this became a 'convenient cover for the pursuit of pleasure' (p50), and led to the development of what they called 'large scale pleasure zones' (p61). The literature on pleasure zones and spaces has been well-developed and explored through such concepts as product life cycles (Butler, 1980), while the concept and future development of tourism places have been explored from both a theoretical and practical viewpoint through the work of Meethan (2001) and Zukin (2000).

The concept of future fantasy tourism spaces was first seen in modern times with the opening of Disneyland in 1955. Over a relatively short period of time, this has developed into a global phenomenon, through concepts such as the city as a theme park and the transformation of themed shopping malls into fantasy leisure and tourism spaces (Shaw and Williams, 2004). These trends, along with the shift in interest from mass tourism to niche tourism by DMO's (Yeoman, 2008) has led to an interest in the impact of these changes at the level of individual businesses, and on the future development of the hotel (Pearson, 2011; Warne, 2011a; Watson, 2008).

There has also been an increase in research into niche tourism and the development of segmentation based on lifestyles, and this is reflected in products such as family restaurants and boutique hotels (Jones, 2006). It could be argued that the provision of sexual services by hotels is no different from other forms of segmentation based on lifestyle choices, and could be described as niche tourism, based around market segmentation. Recently there has also been an increase in research into the possible future development of hotel facilities (Juergen, 2011; Lyons, 2011; Pearson 2011; Warne, 2011a,b). Such studies have developed from a futurist perspective, but there has been little research into the feasibility of these possible futures from a management perspective, especially the adoption of some of this new technology. Botterill (2011) has suggested, that examining topics that do not fit into the dominant narratives of tourism research, challenges the norms of what we think as acceptable, and are often rejected by both academics and the tourism industry, as not relevant.

## **Research Methods**

To investigate future timeframes for the demise and adoption of new technology, two focus groups (18 managers in total: 13 male and 5 female) were conducted with hotel managers in two UK city regions. Focus groups with hotel managers were used for a number of reasons, including: the explorative nature of the study, the wisdom of collective professional opinions and the need for the researcher to cope with difficult questions. Given that one of the aims of the study was to provide information to the managers on future timeframes about the demise and development of technology, it was necessary to develop a consensus as to future dates/actions. Focus groups, as noted by Krueger and Casey (2000), are an ideal method to test generalisations, explore topics and to gain insights and understanding. In focus groups, the importance of group dynamics helps in developing a deeper understanding of the issues, and that the researcher had to stop both group discussions after two hours, which is the normal time limit for such discussions, highlights the level of interest in the topic (Gross, 1996; Finn, et al. 2000).

In order to help with the management of the study, two of the hotel managers agreed to act as liaison managers/reference point for discussion/decision of methodological issues. Before the focus groups were conducted, a list of suggested items for discussion was developed from the literature review, and commented on and refined by the two liaison hotel managers (one from each group), so that the explored topics/questions (listed in tables 1,2,3) would be of interest and relevant to the participating hotel managers. These topics/questions were derived from the work of: Juergen, 2011; Levy, 2007; Lyons, 2011; Pearson, 2011; Warne, 2011a; Warne, 2011b; Watson, 2008. It is acknowledged that in the selection of the topics/questions, there was tension between those that were of interest to the researcher, and those of the hotel managers. Following each of the focus groups, the two sets of results were circulated to both groups, and although there was a remarkable consensus between the two groups, there were some differences, but through two iterations of circulating the results, consensus on the dates was reached. Unlike consumer focus groups where the participants usually do not know each other, most of the hotel managers knew each other through their professional contacts, and this helped in creating a free flowing discussion. The first part of both focus groups discussions concentrated on the likely timelines for the adoption of selected different type's new technology in hotels, while the second part focused specifically on the issue of the future use of robots, including sexual service robots. As people may feel uncomfortable talking about sexual issues, especially in an open forum like a focus group, after discussions with the liaison managers; it was decided to delay discussions about sexual service robots to the far future scenario. By providing a timeframe outside the hotel manager's likely working life experience (twenty+ years), it was thought that they would be freer to speak about issues; they were not likely face in their current working environment.

To help in framing the discussions and to encourage hotel managers to start to think about the future from a known fixed point, the focus groups first discussed the likely demise of some known hotel technologies in this decade (table 1). The groups then discussed in table 2, the likely dates for the adoption of some known or at least foreseeable technology innovations in the next ten to twenty years. Then they discussed in table 3, the possible adoption of more speculative future hotel services in the far future (the next twenty-thirty years) particularly as they relate to the future of sexual services in hotels. This notion of exploring the possible end/adoption dates of technology was adapted from concepts developed by Watson (2008), when assessing possible future technology trends.

## **Discussion of Research Results**

In order to avoid long discussions over exact dates for future events, it was agreed with the two hotel liaison managers and emphasised again at the start of the focus group discussions, that they should agree five-year time ranges for the likely extinction/adoption dates. As shown in table 1, the hotel managers expect the demise of a large range of traditional products/services within this decade. These products/services can be broadly grouped into four. 1. Traditional products/services that are already on the way out (room keys, headed notepaper, shoeshine services) or are rarely provided. 2. Outdated, or soon to be outdated, technology (fax machines, tube televisions, wired in-room internet access). 3. Relatively recent services aimed at the business traveller (business centres, printing). 4. Major changes that probably reflect and are dependent on wider societal trends (less use of cash, demise of physical facilities).

Not surprising, the further into the future the agreed dates for the likely extinction of products/services, the wider the date ranges, as the level of uncertainty increases. It was noticeable that uncertainty increased when the expense of providing the products/services had already been incurred, as managers may be unwilling to discount the investment costs already made in products/services, such as business centres. The results from this part of the study suggest that we can expect major changes in the provision of familiar products/services by the end of decade. In discussions, the managers stressed that increasingly guests (particularly business travellers) are relying more on their own personal ITC tools than those provided by the hotels.

Table 1: Estimated Extinction Dates of Some Existing Products/Services in 3 & 4 Star Hotels

<b>Hotel Products/Services</b>	<b>Agreed Date of Extinction</b>	<b>Date Range</b>
Real hotel room keys	2015	2013-2019
Lobby pay phones	2015	2012-2018
Fax machines	2015	2014-2017
Shoeshine service	2015	2013-2015
In-room coffee machines	2015	2014-2019
Hotel headed note paper, envelopes and pens	2015	2012-2016
Hotel mail boxes	2015	2012-2016
Tube televisions	2015	2014-2020
Front desk printing facilities	2020	2019-2026
Business centres	2020	2019-2025
In-room telephone landlines	2020	2017-2024
In-room wired internet	2020	2017-2027
In-room mini bars	2020	2015-2026
Payment by cash	2025	2014-2035
Physical concierge desk	2025	2019-2040
Physical front desk	2025	2015-2045

Looking more to the future, the topics listed in table 2 were drawn from a number of studies about possible future technologies that could have a direct impact in the design of the hotel (Lyons 2011; Pearson 2011; Warne, 2011a; Warne, 2011b; Watson, 2011). The trends in the first third of the listed topics in table 2 (up to 2020), are reliant on modifications and wider use to known technology (cell phones, wi-fi) based on customer use of their own personal ITC tools. Also in this table we can also see the first rejection of technology, with the

possible development of technology connection free hotels, so that hotel guests can wind down from accessing technology when on a hotel break. However, like the temperance hotels of the last century, they may be fighting a losing trend, as technology becomes more ingrained into our lifestyle. There was also a suggestion, particularly for business travellers, that the new B&Bs or budget hotels would not be Bed and Breakfast establishments, but rather Bed & Broadband hotels, where hotels provide just a bedroom and wireless broadband.

The second likely trend in the period 2020-2025 may be substantial changes in the provision of hotel bedroom services with developments to in-room entertainment systems, such as: whole wall TV's, personalised window views, along with improvements to the quality of the room environment through such selections as scent releasing fragrances and high quality filtered air.

The third trend likely to occur after 2020 is dependent on the widespread adoption of feasible and known, but relatively high cost technology such as 4D TV (physical experiences such as smell, wind) and improvements to medical technology that will identify a guest's possible medical fitness.

The fourth trend listed as a possibility, but not likely until after 2030, is the widespread use in front of office service robots in hotels, to provide hospitality services to guests. Such services could include delivering luggage to rooms, room cleaning and escorting guests to their rooms. They could also replace the need for check-in staff and desks.

Table 2: Likely Adoption Dates of Some Products/Services in 3 & 4 Star Hotels

<b>Hotel Products/Services</b>	<b>Likely Adoption Date</b>	<b>Source of Idea</b>
Wi-fi equipped TV's	2015	Warne 2011a
Bed & Broadband only hotels	2015	Warne 2011b
Cell/Mobile phone check-in	2020	Warne 2011a
Room key on cell/mobile phone	2020	Warne 2011a
Biometric in-room safes/mini-bars	2020	Watson 2008
Wireless room service trays	2015	Warne 2011a
Black Hole/connection free hotel rooms/hotels	2015-2020	Future Foundation
Movement sensing room lights	2015-2020	Managers
Scent releasing bedcovers	2015-2020	Pearson 2011
Premium quality filtered air	2020	Watson 2008
In-table electronic menus in hotel restaurants	2020	Hotel Managers
Electronic light black-out windows	2015-2020	Pearson 2011, Warne 2011a
Individual selection of personal views from windows	2020-2015	Pearson 2011
Whole wall TV's	2020	Warne 2011a, Pearson 2011
Virtual Holidays	2025	Hay 2008
Medical monitoring through hotel facilities	2025	Pearson 2011

Augmented reality such as atmospheric temperature/sound controls (Seaside, Mountains)	2025	Pearson 2011
Virtual hotel staff	2030	Pearson 2011
Four D in-room TV's	2030	
Electro-responsive bed linen	2030	Pearson 2011
Bar tender robots	2030	Lyons 2011
In-room social service robots	2030	Juergen 2011, Pearson 2011
Front desk service robots	2035	Managers
Hotel porter robots	2035	Managers
Restaurant waiter robots	2035	Managers
Dream menu selection	2040	Pearson 2011

The most difficult timeframe to investigate was the far future and the possible use of service and sexual service robots (table 3), whether they were provided by the hotel or owned by the guest. Over the last fifty years, the world has changed without us noticing especially through the adoption of new technology. Robots are now a lot more common than we think and are increasingly replacing services that used to be delivered by humans. For example: banking services have been replaced by ATMs, maps by satellite navigation tools, fighter aircraft by drones and robot soldiers (Carroll, 2011). Most of these robots are background machines, as either we do not see them at all, or they look like machines. However, in the last few years, machines in the form of robots have started to provide direct services to humans. Homecare service robots are being developed to assist the elderly, robot pets to interact with children and robot library assistants to fetch and replace books; some are even forecasting that by 2050, a robot team will win the world soccer tournament (Carroll, 2011).

Of all the possible future options for sexual services, which could be provided, managers were not concerned with the provision most of them, such as a sexual concierge services or even holographic love making projections. Perhaps because their provision was seen as an extension of existing services of the hotel experience. However, the provision of sexual service robots stimulated the most debate in the focus groups. It was not so much that using robots for sexual services was rejected, for as a number of managers noted, the use of sexual self-pleasuring aids/toys already exist, but the concept that humanoid robots could be developed for sex, was difficult to believe. Some managers saw such a humanoid sexual robot as the ideal partner, as they never get tired and there would be no complaints in the morning! When pressed as to whether they could see the day, when humans would walk into a hotel accompanied by their own sexual pleasure robots, this was rejected as they thought guests would more likely make use of the hotel's own robots, as they felt there would be some stigma in using your own personal robot for sex, outside their home. They also noted that using the hotel's robot, offered a degree of autonomy.

As for other sexual services, they found the concept of voyeurism TV difficult to accept, although they did acknowledge that the internet already made this possible. However, they did see a future for full-scale holographic projections of your own partner onto the hotel bed – a form of virtual lovemaking for the lonely business traveller.

In terms of future hotel developments, the managers foresaw hotels shifting from purely functional purposes such as business and leisure trips, to sexual pleasure holidays, where the purpose of the trip to a hotel, was for sexual pleasure – a new form of adventure tourism!

That is, the destination of some future trips would be the hotel itself, not the location. In terms of the provision of new services, they foresaw that guests would be able to request segregated floors, just as today we have smoking and non-smoking floors, they will be able to request a sexual pleasure or non-sexual pleasure floor. Other feasible developments that hotels could provide included: a personal sexual butler service, sexual concierge services and the provision of sexual stimulating drugs, but these were thought as unlikely, until there were changes in the law and social conventions.

Table 3: Likely Adoption Dates of Some Possible Hotel Sexual Services

<b>Hotel Sexual Services</b>	<b>Likely Adoption date</b>	<b>Source of Idea</b>
Sexual concierge service	2020-2025	Pearson 2011
Sexual service pleasure focussed boutique hotels	2025-2030	
Virtual love-making/holographic TV images	2030-2040	Pearson 2011
Sexual life size holographic projections	2030-2045	
Voyeurism TV channels	2030-2040	
Personal sexual pleasure robots (either personal/owned by the hotels)	2040-2050	Lyons 2011, Levy 2007
Sexual stimulating drugs	2040-2050	Pearson 2011

In the broader discussions about the future provision of sexual services, it was clear that the managers felt uncomfortable with the use of terms such as a personal sexual service, and it was noticeable that the term sexual entertainment was quickly adopted by both focus groups. To what degree this was a means of adopting a more socially acceptable term, as what was being discussed was nothing more than a different form of entertainment, is difficult to determine. There was a long debate about the benefits and dis-benefits of hotels providing sexual service robots, some of the managers expressed concern about the legality of hotels providing such robots, the impacts on the brand and their existing markets and the profitability of the hotel. Other managers saw such a service as a means of overcoming the illegal nature of prostitution, and the development of another and possibly very strong, income stream.

Goffman (1961) suggests that when we have an encounter with another human, this acts as a means whereby two people can maintain a ‘symbolic, visual auditory and at times, tactile contact’ (p83), but the managers were very unsure if it was possible to develop such a relationship with a robot. However, they did raise some broader societal concerns about the use of robots for sex, for example, did the provision of male and female robots change the power relationships between the genders, and can robots help to change the existing social order, as also suggested by Levy (2007). Thinking more tactically, a number of managers did foresee difficulties in the future with recruiting younger staff. This could result in hotels facing severe labour shortages in the medium future, and one suggestion was that service robots could replace human staff. When asked what type of staff would work in hotels, which provided sexual service robots, they found this question difficult to answer, but did agree that the hotel would need very clear Human Resource policies.



When pressed about the development of sexual fantasy tourism destinations, where a number of hotels could cluster together to develop as a sexual focused destination. This was seen as a possible option, but all agreed, that this was unlikely to be adopted by the mainstream hotel groups as this could damage existing brands, but could be adopted by new hotel groupings. They also suggested that such niche markets would unlikely to be supported by publicly funded DMOs.

## **Conclusions**

Any discussions about the future always proves to be a challenging topic to research, as it is difficult to encourage people to think outside their comfort zone, and this study was no different. However, by tackling the issues in three distinct time stages, and building confidence in the managers' ability throughout each of these stages, it did prove possible to explore future options for the development of hotels. The adoption of any new technology by hotels was determined by the degree of certainty that the technology was already being adopted. So near future technology, such as using cell/mobile phones as room keys was foreseen with a high degree of certainty, while the adoption of other changes was less certain. The study suggested that the use of service robots will become common by 2030, as will the use of personal sexual robots, but their widespread use will be constrained by social conventions. The day of walking into a hotel with your own sexual pleasure robot will likely happen within a generation, but it may be through a side door!

There are a number of research methodological concerns about this study. The use of two liaison managers and how much they shaped the outcome of the study by imposing their own limitations on the topics explored is acknowledged. This was especially notable when there was tension in selecting questions that were of interest to the researcher, rather than the managers. There was also a concern in using a group of hotel managers who knew each other, and their willingness to open-up in front of their professional colleagues. The difficulty in asking questions about the future on any topic is recognised and questions about the future of sexual services brought its own unique challenges, including the researchers own biases and the unspoken social and moral constraints under which we all operate. The selection of research questions may be biased, as they were generated from the literature, rather than developed by the focus groups. The limitations of the researcher's own interpretation of what was said by the managers is also acknowledged.

In terms of further research, as this research focused on the perceptions of middle ranking hotel managers, for a fuller understanding of the issue, further research is needed into the views of hotel guests as well as junior staff and the more senior managers, head office staff/owners and DMOs, especially publicly funded DMOs. The perceptions and motivations of those developing such technology would also help to understand how the technology could be better understood. The moral and religious issues raised by the possible use of robots for sexual pleasure is also poorly understood, and needs further study as does the local residents perceptions of the acceptability of such hotels and the feasibility of creating sexually focussed destinations.

In terms of the future of robots in hotels, clearly they will have a role in providing front office services. However, in terms of personal sexual service robots, hotel managers expressed concern about their ability to exercise legal and moral control over activities that take place in their hotels. It is likely that the future of sexual services provided by hotels will be determined, not by the hotel nor by their guests, but by wider societal norms. As a

consumer's expectations of what they are seeking from a hotel changes over time, so the hotel must adapt, but if sexual services robots were to be acceptable by society, hotels will provide such a service.

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